

Transcription: Dale Freitag

Today is Thursday, September 30th, 2010. My name is James Crabtree and I'll be interviewing Mr. Dale Freitag. We are at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas, and this interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank for taking the time to come down here today, Mr. Castaneda, sit down and tell us a little bit about your story. I guess the best question always to start with is tell us a little bit about your background and your life before you entered the service.

Dale Freitag: Before I entered the service, I'd grown up with a bunch of veterans from World War II. I had an uncle who was in the Navy and fought on destroyers, and an uncle who was in the Marine Corps, and landed on Iwo Jima. I had my best friend's father was in the Army in the Battle of the Bulge, served under Patton, and my dad's uncle was a bomber pilot. We had gone, I think I remember seeing him about twice in my life. I remember going to Wright Patterson Field in Ohio and seeing the big airplanes there and getting the tours and sitting in the cockpit and playing with the yoke and all of that fun stuff that little kids like to do. The Cold War was going on. My generation after the Vietnam conflict, I was one of the last, in fact I was the last year to sign up for the draft, and then they canceled the draft and so I didn't get drafted, and so I went off to college. The war was not the greatest thing going on. I made it through college, got a degree in design.

Where were you from originally?

Dale Freitag: Originally from the east side of Cleveland in Ohio. Then I went to Illinois to go to college where I met my wife, and we got married and with my degree was working at a TV station. I was doing the production work at the TV station and it was satisfying, but it was not exciting and the technology was so-so, and my brother-in-law was flying for the Air Force and he'd been flying for the Air Force for a number of years, and he was getting out of the Air Force and he said why don't you just go and take the test and see how well you score. So I did and I scored really well on the test and they offered me a position in the Air Force to become a pilot. So I went off to the flight screening program and -

When was this?

Dale Freitag: This was 80s. This was 1982-83, and Star Wars is going on and all of that stuff, and the technology is going on, the F-117 is just deployed but nobody knew about it, and I had the misfortune of going to flight screening and I would have graduated in March, which is right about the time that all the Academy graduates had signed up for pilot training and they had too many Academy graduates and not enough slots. So they had to reduce the number of positions available. So my position became very tenuous. But I met an old master sergeant. They had a flight review board to see whether or not you were going to stay in the service or not. He said looking at your scores, you're maxing out all of these scores and everything and you're doing great, you just pulled a back muscle which is what I had done, and he said you know what, just tell them that you want to still fly. There's a navigator program that you can sign up for. And so that's what I did. They liked me enough to keep me around and so I went through OTS down at Lackland, and then went out to California to Mather Air Force Base in Sacramento, and went through undergraduate training for navigators, and did that and became a certified navigator. But then I really liked technology, and so what was the most technological advanced, what's on the most bleeding edge? Well, it was electronic warfare. So I took a dive for electronic warfare and

got selected and went off to that school for another six months. After completing that school I had to go to Castle Air Force Base in Merced, California, and we went to combat crew training. That was another four months.

So a lot of time in the pipeline.

Dale Freitag: A huge amount of time in the pipeline. And did really good there, was a distinguished graduate coming out of there. So when I came to Carswell in Fort Worth, I was immediately put on a flight commander's crew and I had a really great -

What type of planes?

Dale Freitag: These are B-52's, the ugly B-52's. We had H models and D models at Carswell. Well, for the next six months the D models were going away, and those guys that were the D model guys transitioned to H models so that we all had H models at that base. So after six months we were all flying the same airplanes and doing that. We were doing a lot of alert. Sitting nuclear alert, you live with your airplane for a week, and your family can come visit you at a visitation center, but your crew has to stick together. In fact, when my first daughter was born, I was on alert and we had to have three open phone lines, three guys on the phone talking to the command post, and we had duplicate beepers and everything so that if any kind of alarm went off, we'd immediately have to leave.

How quickly did you have to be able to get your plane in the air?

Dale Freitag: That's classified, but it's quick. It really is quick. One of the neat things though was my aircraft commander, he had never seen his own kids be born because he had been deployed to Vietnam and having him with me there, in fact the whole crew, while my first daughter was being born was really, really special, and we were a family. The six of us – the pilot, the copilot, the radar navigator, the navigator, the gunner and myself as the electronic warfare officer, we were very, very close. Every one of the crews that I moved around to were very close, because you lived and you could die together. We didn't lose very many B-52's the entire time I was in the service. But pulling alert for six years. Eventually I started going down the track to becoming a tactician, and I went to the tactic school, I went to some other special classes, and started learning command control, all of that sort of stuff, went and lived in the tactic squadron for about a year, and then went up to standardization evaluation. So you go through being a crew dog to becoming an instructor, then I became a tactician, then I became an evaluator. Eventually while at Carswell within that six years I became the chief of the standardization evaluations for the wing. Because we had two bomb squadrons and a tanker squadron. Now there's also an F-4 squadron there, but they were reservists. One of the neat things was about the time I made first lieutenant, I was also selected to become a regular officer which was a blessing and a curse. I'll go into that later. But from there I was looking for where I could go next. Well, they were starting a new wing up at Ellsworth Air Force Base up in South Dakota, Rapid City, and there was already a missile wing up there, and there was already a bomb wing up there, but we were the strategic weapons wing. And I got in on the ground floor with that and started it up from scratch. In fact I spent a month and a half as the wing commander's exec just because he needed somebody to babysit, and if you've ever been an executive officer, you know that you got to do everything, including we sent one of our tanker guys to Cadina and he was able to get business cards for all the colonels, the real fancy with the foil business cards and everything like that. And keeping the secretaries sane, make sure the colonel doesn't leave any classified information laying around, all that kind of fun stuff of his. We didn't have

everything in place and having the safe in the right area – it was a nightmare. But thankfully that didn't last very long and I very quickly moved back into strategic operations and did a bunch of work there, which I really can't talk about, and continued to do standardization evaluation. I was the standardization evaluation electronic warfare officer for that entire -

Were you with B-52's the entire time?

Dale Freitag: B-52's the entire time.

So when you're going through your flight training and that sort of thing, at what point did they say OK, this is the type of pilot, or this is what you're going to be with?

Dale Freitag: When you're getting ready to graduate from navigator school. That's when they start making the determination whether or not you're gonna go into Tankers just to be a regular navigator, you're going to go into Wild Weasels as an electronic warfare officer there, or B-52's or EF-111's – those are the airplanes we had back then. About the only thing we still have is the B-52 and the tanker, and then the 130's.

Did you enjoy the B-52's?

Dale Freitag: Loved the B-52's. In fact I knew most of the initial cadre that went into B-1's and I'm glad I stayed in B-52's. It was lots of fun. We did lots of things. We did red flags, we did copper flags, we did green flags.

What does that mean?

Dale Freitag: Red flags are when you go and you fly in the desert in the Las Vegas ranges and you do air combat maneuvering, dropping bombs and stuff like that. Green flags is more of a center towards electronic warfare and so is copper flag, except copper flag is out of Egglund Air Force Base in Florida, and you run against other stuff. Other fun things I got to do is we got to be a target aircraft for the guys coming out of Tampa, the F-16 guys that were just getting ready to graduate, and they'd have to go and find different aircraft to go against. They had some Gulf Streams that were a typical target for them. Then they had some F-15's and some Navy guys, the F-18 guys, the Marines and the Navy who were always kind of fun to play with. But then they'd give us, and they used to call the B-52 the flying geomask because it was just so huge. But we used to look for the clouds in the area and we'd go into the clouds and you settle the airplane into the top of the clouds and you got this big shark tail going up through the top of the clouds and the pilots are up there looking and we could settle down into the clouds and my job what I was doing was jamming all of the air-to-air radars and ground-to-air radars to keep us alive. My whole job was to defend the airplane and work with the other guys. But one time when we were at a William Tell which is where all the F-15's and F-16's and 810's all come to do their shootouts and we're out there and we're flying along in William Tell and we'd done about three or four F-15's and I think it was about the fifth F-15, he comes up and the AWACs is guiding the whole fight, and he's directing him in and how to attack us, and he comes in and I'm jamming the socks off this guy, and we're maneuvering like crazy. He can't get a radar lock. We are completely outside the parameters in the way he's flying. He can't shoot us with a radar missile. He can't get in to shoot us with his heat-seeking missile because the B-52 is kind of neat because the engines are kind of out in front of the wings and when you get down really low, the air coming off those wings and off the engines churns up and the heat seekers can't find it. You almost have to get under the B-52. A B-52 flying at 200 feet, you're not going to get underneath.

I don't even know any F-18 guys that will even do that. This guy's up there and he's getting really frustrated and he finally tells the AWACs I'm going in for a gunshot. Well we can hear this. So we suckered him in basically, and he comes flying in and he's coming off our right-hand wing high and he starts sliding in and my pilot drops the gear, drops the flaps, everything gets really dirty on the airplane and the airplane goes from about 400 mph down to about 150mph, that fast, and all of a sudden he's rushing towards this airplane and the tail swings right into his face and our gunner yells Fox 4, Fox 4, and that counts as him getting shot down by the B-52. So then the airplane gets all cleaned up and we go flying away. We later came to find out that this was a guy that was at the top of the leader board and he dropped all the way to the bottom and he was looking for us at the O Club with blood in his eyes. But we also did really cool things with the Marines. We would take the F-18's and suck 'em up underneath our wings and with the giant radar cross section of a B-52, even the AWACs couldn't differentiate the F-18's and so they would set up what they called the wall of eagles where they had four F-15's and they're going to try and shoot down the F-16's and 810's and B-52's are coming in to strike the targets. Well all of a sudden this B-52 starts climbing out of low level – we were down around 800 feet – and we start climbing up. The F-15's are going to go for the really best shot. They want a high quality kill. Then in the back I'm electronically figuring out where these F-15's are because they are still beyond visual range. The copilot's out there looking and he still can't see 'em yet. I said they're getting ready to lock on to us. I gave the code word over the radio and these two F-18's go flying off just like we'd launched cruise missiles off our wings, and the F-18's, all of a sudden the F-15's guy had to figure out what the heck just happened, and the F-18 guys are really good, and they would lock 'em up with their long range missiles just about to – and their long range missiles are the same as the F-15 long range missiles, and they would get their Fox 1 shot off and be able to shoot the F-15 down because we just confused the heck out of them. All those kind of fun and games and all that tactic stuff. One of the things that was developed was the bomber weapon school. You may have heard of the fighter weapon school which is just like Top Gun for the Navy and the Marines. Well, one of the things I was able to do is go through their entire curriculum and fly with them and we did all the evaluation and the validation of their program, so that was kind of fun. I've been to Las Vegas more times than I even care to think about.

So how long did you stay in ultimately active duty?

Dale Freitag: 13 years. I was in during Desert Storm. I was on Desert Storm orders but my orders sent me to Michigan. We would -

Where did you go in Michigan, what base was that?

Dale Freitag: Wurtsmith Air Force Base. We took an evaluator pilot and evaluator radar navigator and myself and we went to certify the follow on troops because the guys up at Wurtsmith had been sending back to back alerts. They weren't getting to fly very much and they were set up for nuclear war. So to get them prepped to go to tactical or conventional we had to go and we had to fly with them, test them, and say OK, wing commander, these guys are ready to go. And in fact some of them did go and some of them got to fly once or twice and that was about it because the war ended so quickly. But that's what I did there. My final job was as the director of academics for the Joint Employment Tactic School. That's where we brought in Navy, Marines, Army, CIA, DIA -

At Ellsworth?

Dale Freitag: This was at Ellsworth and we brought them together and taught them how to work together, basically how to fight Desert Storm better. We taught lessons learned from all the way back to World War II in how to communicate. There's a lot of stuff that we did not do real well, but there was a lot of stuff that we did do real well, and those were the kind of things that we went into. The other job I had, you have multiple jobs. I'm sure you're very familiar with that. As a young captain, yes, we had lots of stuff and one of my jobs was to be the computer officer, and so I owned all the computers under the DO, and we were getting ready. We had just gotten a whole bunch of new computers and one of my students was this young Marine captain, and he was there and he saw me putting these laptops in a box and he said what are you doing with that? He had just come up to talk tactics. I said yeah, we're getting ready to dispose of them, turn them over to the DRMO for getting rid of them. He said God, the Navy never gives us any computers. This was back '89, '90, '92, all in there. He said we don't have anything, we got a couple of desktops and that's about it. I said do you want this stuff? And yeah he got his gunnie and I got my master sergeant together and they walked off with a truckload of hardware and software. So they were really happy.

Oh I bet. The Marine Corps has always kind of felt like a stepchild with certain gear.

Dale Freitag: Anytime we could help 'em, that's what we did.

So you did 13 years. Was there a particular reason you got out at that time?

Dale Freitag: Remember I mentioned being a regular officer? Yeah, if you are a regular officer and you were not promoted, you were asked to leave. I came up for my promotion at the same time that they retired 200 of the 300 B-52's, so -

Downsizing.

Dale Freitag: So you're part of that weapon system and no matter, our retention rates were atrocious. We were massacred.

Did you miss it?

Dale Freitag: I did. In fact I had my next job lined up, and all I did was make major.

I know the B-52's for a while as a child I lived up in Arlington area and I remember going over to Fort Worth and you'd see those things flying and they were just enormous the way they'd just shake the ground and I remember my dad bought a car from a dealership somewhere over there near Carswell, and it seemed like every five or ten minutes there was one roaring overhead. It might have been close to the flight line. It was loud.

Dale Freitag: At one end of the flight line, there's the lake, Lake Worth, and I did see an F-4 crash into the lake. He missed the end of that runway. He had lost both of his engines right there and the airplane just didn't have enough forward velocity and they both ejected. But off the other end of the runway is a mall.

Yeah, it must've been somewhere in that area then. They were flying right overhead.

Dale Freitag: And there's all kinds of, there's a bunch of car dealerships, and one side is Carswell and on the opposite side of the runway is General Dynamics, or what used to be General Dynamics. It's now Lockheed.

Have you been back up there at all?

Dale Freitag: A couple of times. My base house is gone. I think it's a Wal-Mart now where the base housing used to be.

I was up there just a couple of weekends ago and noticed a big joint reserve base up there now. It is weird to see some things getting taken away, the base housing and that sort of stuff.

Dale Freitag: Yeah, the facilities there were really good. I was really surprised when they decided to – but the good news is they did transfer it over to reserves.

I think what's even stranger is I think the Navy now is actually the head running it. It's like Naval air station Carswell Joint Reserve Base, something like that. It's strange that they got to be there now. Well so what brought you ultimately to Texas?

Dale Freitag: At Carswell, both my daughters were born there. When I got out of the military, I went to Minneapolis, Minnesota, and was working up there as a computer consultant and I got hired by IBM as an account manager, and they were going to start a customer relationship management program down here in Austin, and the VP of sales brought me down here. I've been doing sales and operations and marketing down here with IBM for a number of years, and then about a little over a year ago, they let me go. They retired, or not retired, but they laid off 16,000 people in one swat. It was bloody. In fact it still is bloody.

Sure. Well all your time in the Air Force you told us some pretty good stories, some good memories. Was there anything during your service that was particularly trying? I know you mentioned being on the alerts.

Dale Freitag: One of the things that was hard is for a family, was right after my second daughter was born, I went off to squadron officer school and while there my daughter, I missed the first four months of her life because I was off there. Being on alert was tough on the family. Flying in B-52's, we would have one day flight, one night flight, and your body clock gets all messed up. Back then we were flying 12, 14, 16-hour flights. We had one up to Fairbanks, Alaska, which was kind of fun, out of Carswell, just to do it. But towards the end of my career they were getting more fuel efficient and we had what's called the strategic training range up there in Montana, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, and we could take off flight arrange and be landed in less than three hours. Those were groovy days. That was kind of fun, plus had lots of fun. I have a nephew who is flying C-130s and he's been over to the sandbox a couple of times.

Were you able to give him some advice?

Dale Freitag: In fact he's in a reserve unit out of California and I sent him a whole boxful of tactic stuff, all the unclassified stuff that I could find, and then pointed him in the right direction to get some other stuff.

That's really good. Well sir, I appreciate you taking the time to come down here to tell us a little bit about your service, and all these stories are unique. I like to say every veteran has a story to tell and they all kind of come together like a patchwork quilt. Everybody has served different times, different places, different branches, but we'll be adding this to the collection of all the other ones we've had so maybe hopefully a couple hundred years from now someone might hear this and learn something. They might even not know what a B-52 is and they can hear what you've said about it and read about it later and that sort of thing.

Dale Freitag: Being in the military though is all about service. One of the things I did was, I was very involved with the Red Cross. The head of the Red Cross up at Ellsworth, great lady, Rita, she had tried to give out a little certificate for people who were deployed to tell them when they had a child. And people get sent away all the time and they're away maybe three, four, six months, but we turned that into a real program and developed this really pretty certificate and everything, and so yes, in doing all of those type of service things, that's what it's all about.

Is there anything you'd want to say if you considered that somebody might be listening to this years from now, anything you'd want to say to someone listening about, I mean you kind of just said it, but about your service or any advice?

Dale Freitag: The service itself, it doesn't matter what branch of service you go into, what you're going to learn is to be a responsible citizen more than anything else and whether you're fighting the Cold War or a hot war, it doesn't matter. That's probably the one thing that you'll always take away from your time in the military, and it's a good way to grow up, too. You learn things about yourself that you never knew you could do. I never knew I could study 18 hours a day. But yes.

Well that's great. Well sir, on behalf of Commissioner Patterson who's a veteran and everybody else here at the Land Office, we want to thank you for your service and in a couple of weeks we'll be sending you some CD's with this interview on it that you can give to your family or friends or keep for yourself. We'll send you five or six copies, and along with eventually a nice, speaking of certificates, a letter and certificate from Commissioner Patterson thanking you for your service.

Dale Freitag: Well thank you.

Well thank you very much. I appreciate it.

[End of recording]